

Distinguished Guests,

It is a great pleasure to attend today's ceremony at Clare Hall of Cambridge University. Four Sakura cherry trees have already been planted here in 2021 and I am grateful to be involved in planting a fifth one on this site. Now is indeed the best time to enjoy Sakura coming into bloom, steadily sprouting fresh new leaves. One could regard these blossoms as symbolising the growing relationship between Japan and the UK, with Cambridge University playing a significant part.

The Sakura Cherry Tree Project is a magnificent initiative and has played a prominent role in strengthening the ties between Japan and the UK. In this regard I would like to take this opportunity to acknowledge the tireless efforts of the Founder and Joint Chair Mr Sandy Sano, Lady Victoria Borwick and Ms Chizuko Winter, who have worked very hard to arrange the planting all over the UK, as well as all the other members of the project. Since the project started in 2019, as many as 7,500 trees have been planted, with an eventual target of 10,000 trees all across the UK. That is a massive number but I believe it can be achieved, making our friendship everlasting as Sakura trees grow.

Of course, Cambridge University, especially Clare Hall, has a distinguished history of exchanging outstanding students and fellows with Japan, to the benefit of our bilateral relations. Notwithstanding the undoubted strength of our bond in a number of key areas including the economy and science and technology, one of the most important elements of our friendship has come about through exchanges between people. In that sense, Clare Hall is the perfect setting for the Sakura cherry trees to blossom and flourish.

I think scenes of Sakura cherry trees in spring, with their vibrant colours and transient beauty, have a special place in the hearts of Japanese people. I hope that these five cherry trees will resonate in a similar way with the people visiting Clare Hall in the future.

Thank you very much.